

Testimony before the Education Committee February 24, 2016
In support of: HB-5304 An Act Concerning Authorization of State Grant
Commitments for School Building Projects

Representative Fleischmann, Senator Slossberg and members of the Education Committee, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to present testimony regarding HB-5304 specifically Projects: 212-0026 and 212-0025; creation of the 20th agriscience center in Connecticut and the renovation of science labs at Shepaug Valley School.

Good afternoon. My name is Kim Gallo, and I am proud to serve as principal of Shepaug Valley School. As the current principal of a unique high school, the former principal of an agricultural high school, and an evaluator of New England schools as a NEASC Chair, I am very familiar with the value of a rigorous, relevant education that offers diverse, authentic learning experiences for all students. I strongly believe that the creation of an AgSTEM program in Region 12 will increase these opportunities for all students.

The creation of the AgSTEM program at Shepaug is important to our community. Rural communities in the northwest corner of Connecticut are facing the challenge of declining enrollments. We have an excellent school, and we want to keep it alive. Shepaug students consistently perform above the national and state average average on the SAT, scored among the top ten schools in Math and Language Arts in Connecticut on the initial SBAC test, and sent more than ninety percent of our students to college upon their graduation from Shepaug. In the past five years, more than ten percent of our students were admitted to the top tier colleges in our nation. However, a meaningful education includes a robust, diverse population of learners to challenge each other and to offer varied perspectives on our changing world. The vexing problem of declining population stretches the resources of the generous communities that we serve, and limits the amount of competition that pushes our students to ever higher levels of achievement.

The creation of an AgSTEM school in Region 12 will surely address these issues, providing a stable population for years to come while providing the communities of Brookfield, Danbury, New Fairfield, New Milford, Newtown, and Sherman with more opportunities for their children to be inspired by a concentration in agriscience and STEM in their high school years.

The creation of the AgSTEM program at Shepaug is important to learning. Through the program, our students will explore the resources of our world, learn to care for human and animal populations, and learn global citizenry as they develop a respect and value for our planet. They will explore and contribute their ideas to important questions, such as: How will we feed our ever-growing population? What does it mean to create a sustainable business? How does theory turn into practice? While many students will continue their education in an agricultural field, all students students will benefit from the challenging concepts that come alive in an AgSTEM classroom.

Your consideration of **HB-5304 specifically Projects: 212-0026 and 212-0025** shows that you are already aware of the importance of supporting rural populations and I urge you to support funding of these projects. Help us to create a legacy!

Respectfully submitted,

Kimberly Gallo
Principal, Shepaug Valley School